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SUBJECT: AMB SATTERFIELD BRIEFS GOK ON IRAQ DEVELOPMENTS

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and d

Summary

1. (S) In a nearly four hour session with Kuwaiti MFA and security officials, S/I Satterfield and team briefed on developments in Iraq, with particular focus on progress made re Sunni outreach/reconciliation and significance of Basrah confrontation between PM Maliki and Iraqi Security Forces and violent elements of the Jaysh al-Mahdi, including the Iranian-backed "Special Groups". The team underscored the strategic importance for Kuwait and GCC states of the strong reaction by Maliki and the Iraqi(including Shia) street against the violence perpetrated by Iran,s surrogates. Support from all political elites in Iraq, notably Sunni Tawaffuq leader al-Hashimi, for Maliki was running very strong. This was a moment of opportunity for Iraq,s Arab neighbors "for their own sake" to step forward with support and encouragement for the positive developments now taking place. The GOK side responded with skepticism, asserting that they understood the situation in the south very well and dismissing Basrah events as inter-Shia political fighting that did not alter their assessment of Maliki as a sectarian leader. End summary.

Progress on the Ground

2. (S) S/I Ambassador David Satterfield, leading a USG delegation from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Multi-National Forces-Iraq, and Washington analysts, on May 4 briefed senior Kuwaiti MFA and Intelligence officials on progress in Iraq. Satterfield and team underscored the urgency of Arab support and engagement with Iraq, briefing in detail on the progressive evolution of security post-US surge and Sunni "Awakening" movement and the resultant emergence of positive but still fragile political dynamics at national and provincial levels. PM Maliki and the GOI were acting with greater cohesion and confidence as a "national" government, although much more needed to be done to advance the rule of law and the provision of essential services. Reconciliation efforts, all but non-existent seven months ago, were now moving forward. These steps needed to be nurtured and sustained, but the progress was real. Similarly real and highly significant for the strategic interests of the US and our partners in the region, Maliki and the GOI were now engaged in a confrontation with the most violent Shia militia elements backed by Iran.

Iran Facing Choices

13. (S) Satterfield and team underscored that Maliki's intervention in Basrah had weakened and made more vulnerable Iran's position both in southern Iraq and throughout Iraq. Iran does not want to place the Iraqi government or Shia street in a position where they must choose between the U.S. and Iran, or indeed between the Government of Iraq and the Government of Iran. But Iranian overplaying of its hand in Iraq through backing of violent groups no longer under any meaningful Iraqi control "including Muqtada al-Sadr" was leading to just such choices. Iran wanted to continue to deal with Iraq as it dealt with Hizballah in Lebanon and radical Palestinians in Damascus; preferring to advance its interests through violent factions and surrogates rather than on a state-to-state basis. Iran wanted to have it both ways: to have good relations with the GOI and at the same time support armed elements outside the control of the state. This duality had to come to an end. What had happened in Basrah, if sustained and presented as the Iraqi state establishing control over the country rather than as a Shia political struggle for power would be a very significant step forward for Iraq and the region.

Basrah, A Critical Development

14. (S) Satterfield and MG Robeson explained that Maliki's actions against the Basrah armed groups in late March took us all by surprise. We had been urging the GOI to act in Basrah for a year; what had changed was Maliki's realization that the situation there "security/political/economic" was out of control and a danger to the Iraqi state as a whole. While the military campaign could have been better prepared and resourced, the JAM in the end stood down and allowed the ISF to establish control in Basrah and Umm Qasr port. Most important, the Shia and broader Iraqi street in the south and in Baghdad rallied to support the PM "the simple fact that the GOI at long last took action to defend citizens from the depredations of criminal and violent elements had prompted an emotional and positive response. And Iraq's political leaders, including Tariq al-Hashimi, had also come to the PM's side. This broad political backing needed to be translated, Satterfield noted, into concrete progress on all fronts: reconciliation, security, and further establishment of government control and rule of law. National feelings and resentment of Iran's actions were running high; these too needed to be translated into lasting measures to affirm the role and presence of the Iraqi state.

15. (S) In response, GEN Suleiman Al-Muhaylan asked if JAM was "defeated" in Basra. Satterfield and Robeson explained that while Iraqi forces had done very well, considering the difficulty of the undertaking, the real consequences of Basrah should be measured in political terms --and in that sense Basrah was indeed a 'victory' for the Iraqi government and a set-back for violent elements and their Iranian backers. Suleiman noted that (Fadilah-backed) Basrah governor Muhammad Wa'ili -- who had just been in Kuwait -- was intentionally left unaware of the pending use of force and suggested that Wa'ili represented more of a positive element in Basrah than did Maliki's military intervention. In a digression, he also spoke of how both Arab and Persian Shia adhere more to the Marja (religious leadership in Shia Islam) in Iraq, than they do in Iran, suggesting that once stable, Iraqi Shia may have broader regional influence. MG Khalid Al Sabah, was skeptical of the degree of success in Basrah and of Maliki's leadership ability, calling the previous Maliki-led Karbala initiative a "disaster." KSS also queried whether the GOI policy would force the Badr Organization and other Shia militias apart from the JAM to disband, and predicted that the militias would evolve and change tactics, taking their lead from the Hezbollah experience in Lebanon. GEN Suleiman assessed that Iran is "playing a game in southern Iraq in its desire to be a regional "superpower." He said that Iran's focus is mainly on the south, and to date, showed little interest in expanding its influence to the middle and northern parts of Iraq. Satterfield reiterated that Iran

posed a political and security challenge throughout Iraq - and to the region and international community as well.

¶16. (S) MFA Follow-up and Coordination Director Amb. Khaled Al-Muqamis queried the "absence" of U.S. forces in Basrah since 2003, laying blame for the current security situation on U.S. forces and lack of USG planning. MG Robeson reiterated that while the situation in Basrah had called for attention for at least a year, what was significant was Maliki's decision to act.

"Awakening" Movements Gradually Embraced By GOI

¶17. (S) Don Blome, Co-chair of the Force Strategic Engagement Cell at Embassy Baghdad, highlighted for the group the recent success of the Sunni Awakening Movements. He detailed the growth from 4,000 to over 100,000 "Sons of Iraq," who are now playing a pivotal role in stabilization efforts in Iraq. The key to the success of the effort, he explained, has been the buy-in of Maliki for the initiative and the gradual integration of the "Sons" into the GOI's security forces and overall security plan. A significant result in this program, he stated, is a growing wedge between local participants--some of whom had previous involvement in insurgencies--and their extremist leaders currently outside of Iraq. The exploitation of this disconnect is resulting in the marginalization of terror groups that were active in Iraq until recently. The end result, he concluded is progress towards building nationalism among those potentially and previously disenfranchised by the GOI.

Plea for Arab Representation in Baghdad

¶18. (S) Recalling similar appeals from the President, VP, the Secretary, Ambassador Crocker and many other senior USG officials, Satterfield emphasized the need for Arab representation in Baghdad and active engagement with the GOI. MG Robeson and Satterfield explained that regardless of the outcome of the upcoming November U.S. Presidential elections, Iraq is likely to witness a drawdown in the number of U.S. troops, highlighting the sense of urgency for collective stabilization efforts. MG Robeson noted "if you had an Ambassador in Iraq, you would have more visibility on this (the urgency of the situation)."

Next Steps

¶19. (S) In response to Satterfield's recommendations on needed actions to contribute to the stabilization of Iraq, such as establishing a presence in Iraq, developing information and intelligence channels, and moving the GOI from Iran, Muqamis said that the official position of the GOK is "supportive of a stable Iraq." He then expressed his personal doubts and suspicions regarding dealing with Iraqi leaders, calling all senior leaders "liars" and suggested that the USG cultivate more "middle" leaders - an apparent reference to former PM Ayad Allawi. Satterfield responded that "middle" leaders such as Allawi would have a greater role to play if they focused their efforts on the political process in their own country rather than touring through the region appealing for external support to be placed in power in Baghdad.

GOK Needs Greater Control of Would Be Freedom Fighters

¶10. (S) Satterfield concluded by saying that USG and Iraqi forces are taking the fight to AQI in Mosul. AQI is diminished, but still a lethal force and it is incumbent upon Iraq's neighbors to prevent the flow of Foreign Fighters into Iraq. Alluding to the GOK's failure to effectively monitor and prevent travel of former Kuwaiti GTMO detainee Abdullah Al-Ajmi (who allegedly carried out a suicide attack in Mosul in late April), and two other Kuwaitis, Satterfield said that

Kuwait must ensure that terror suspects not travel and further disrupt progress in Mosul and added that "We wish Damascus took this more seriously, but we must be able to rely on Kuwait and Iraq's other Arab neighbors."

Comment

11. (S) The Kuwaiti intelligence and foreign affairs interlocutors showed interest in the developments in Iraq as outlined by the USG team, but appeared to hold to the assessment that recent progress is not sufficient to warrant a dramatic reassessment of events in Iraq or of PM Maliki's leadership. The absence of the FM was unfortunate, as he is a senior ruling family member and key decision-maker. In his MFA stead were two office directors who are typically not proactive or influential with the FM. End comment.

Participants:

12. (S/NF) The participants of the 3.5 hour meeting, which was held at Kuwait Security Services (KSS) Headquarters included:

U.S.
Ambassador Deborah Jones
Ambassador David Satterfield, NEA/I
MG Mastin Robeson, J-5 Plans, Strategic Assessments
Don Blome, Force Strategic Engagement Cell, U.S. Embassy
Baghdad
Jillian Burns, Director, Iran Issues, U.S. Consulate Dubai
Joe Forcier, GRPO Head
Tom Rosenberger (notetaker)

GOK
MG Suleiman Al-Muhaylan, Undersecretary for State Security
Affairs and de facto KSS Director
MG Khalid Al-Jarrah Al Sabah, Head of Kuwait Military
Intelligence (J2)
KSS Deputy Director Number One Ahmad Al-Ajil
BG Abdullah Rashid, Deputy Director General Number 2 for
Administration and Intelligence
KSS Iraq Department Chief Colonel Fayiz Bu Hamid
Ambassador Muqamis, MFA Follow up and Coordination
Department
Ambassador Ali Al Sammak, MFA Director, the Americas
Department
KSS Chief of Non-arab Liaison LTC Ali Al-Mutawwa
(Translator)

14. (U) This cable has been cleared by Amb. Satterfield.

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